2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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581 The girl's choice of a husband is undoubtedly influenced by the amount of bride-wealth that the young man is able to provide, and her relatives—father, brothers, and the ra—will try to dissuade her from a poor marriage. Public opinion would, however, be against forcing a girl to take a repugnant partner for the sake of the cattle. [582] The provision of the bride-wealth prevents very early marriage, and men do not appear to marry under about twenty years of age.

584 After the bride-wealth has been arranged the young people go to the house of the girl's father. The latter brings a goat into the enclosure and the father of the prospective bridegroom cuts an ear from the animal and binds it to the girl's ankle, whom all pray to Nyakang and possibly also to Juok. For some time before the marriage the prospective bridegroom begins to provide fish for his future parents-in-law; he will bring fish every day, and only if the catch is large will he keep any for himself. If he gets on well with his parents-in-law he may continue to do this for a long time after marriage, though he is not bound to do so.

585 The wedding feast takes place at the house of the bride's father, after the whole bride-wealth has been handed over. Much beer is prepared and if the father can afford it a bull is killed. Dancing and feasting may last three days. [591] The couple then go to live in the husband's village, where he has already built a house with the aid of [476] his friends—presumably his age mates. No marriage was celebrated [541] during our stay in the Shilluk country, but from our informants we gathered that the time of the actual consummation of marriage was 584 not a matter of great importance, and that this has usually taken place 585 before the marriage feast, which merely marks the fact that the girl leaves her father's house. We concluded that the usual practice was for intercourse to begin, if the girl was old enough, after a fair proportion of the bride-wealth had been given—one informant said seven cows, another six. The man would come to his betrothed's village and send a friend to fetch her away from her father's house, when they would spend the night in some other house in the village. The transfer of the bride-wealth might take two years or more, the first instalment consisting of two cows.

585 Hofmayr describes a ceremony when the concluding ox of the bride-wealth is handed over. The ox is decorated, and the bridegroom and the young people of both sexes from his village accompany it to the bride's village. Here a mock battle takes place and the bride's friends eventually seize the ox. The bridegroom and his companions

15: Oyler M-5 (ca. 1918) 1926 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

the animal carefully, and he made his escape, and ran away. It was too much trouble for them to catch the animal, and so they went back to the old chief and demanded that he give them another animal in exchange for the one that had escaped. The new animal was given to them, and they departed.

Once some women went to dance before a chief, who was away from home. One of his followers, anxious to save the property of his master, took a whip made of hippopotamus hide, and used it freely on the women. They retreated to a considerable distance, and sat down to discuss the matter. At that time the chief returned, and he was distressed when he heard what his follower had done. He made peace with the women, and gave them the ox.

Visitors from other villages are not supposed to go on these trips, nor are they allowed to eat of the meat when the animal is killed. When a woman is married and goes to the village of her husband, she is not allowed to go on these begging trips until after she has lived there a full year. The women might consent, but her husband would be angry, as it might lead to her being led astray. She does not have the right to return to her old home and go with her old friends on their begging expeditions. Women in the advanced stages of pregnancy are not permitted to go on these trips.

These dances are a great diversion for the women. They are looked upon as memorable occasions. The chief visited may not be in a financial position to afford to give the ox, and yet he gets full value for the animal in the prestige it gives him.

The women have another begging custom that is suggestive of Ruth. When a man threshes his grain he calls in the young men, who beat it out with flails. The women of the man's family winnow the grain. Often the man does not have enough women-folk to do all the work, and other women are called in to help. The helpers get all the grain that is left in the chaff as their portion.

Many women come to beg from the owner of the threshing floor. They do not speak to the owner of the floor, but they make a general statement that they have come to beg. They sit in silence, and watch the progress of the work. They do not ask for grain, but each woman keeps her gourd in a prominent position. When the threshing is finished, the owner of the field fills a basket with grain, and from that basket he

18: Howell E-5 (1937) 1941 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

joined, whatever the new formation may be. The regrouping of sub-divisions is often the subject of heated controversy, particularly between the two sub-divisions who will be separated by the new line of distinction. It is apparently preferable to remain the highest sub-division of the newly formed lower age-set and thereby acquire special privileges and duties. At the last *Ngol* ceremony held in the settlement of *Yom Dak Alal*, the two sub-divisions between whom the distinction was to be made actually came to blows. The age-set A, having retired, participates no longer in warfare nor in the ceremonies associated with the organization.

The subdivisions of any age-set are known in Shilluk as "head," "neck" and "middle" respectively. Thus while the "head," "neck" and "middle" sub-divisions of B occupy the same position in a new status, the two or three sub-divisions below them are "head," "neck" and "middle" of C. On ceremonial occasions when the age-sets function as such, the highest age-set is privileged to eat the back and chest of any animal provided, while the lower will eat of the hump and legs only. This division of meat is rigidly observed and any infringment is severely punished. This rule is particularly enforced at the *Ngol* when a bull is slaughtered and ceremonially divided and eaten,—to emphasise the newly acquired privileges of the age-set in the higher status.

After this the newly appointed *Bai* who will be war-leader of the senior age-set, is formally elected and is carried jubilantly round the settlement on the shoulders of his age-mates. Frequently this procession enters the territory of another settlement, the boasts of the younger warriors bring out the young men of the neighbouring district, and fighting occurs.

The *Bai* has no administrative or political functions and has no connection with the *Jago* of the settlement. It is his duty to organise mobilization and to preside at communal feasts at which the age-sets assemble. According to some informants he is assisted in the cultivation of his fields by his age-mates.

After the ceremony is over, each age-set is given a new name, usually taken from some current event or from the colour of the bull

leave the dancing ground. Within a few minutes the village is clear of all guests, those who are unable to stand being swept along in the rush.

Before dancing for the first time the initiate is usually presented with two spears by his father. The sons of rich men are presented with a bull (*Wath Owone*) as well.[1] This bull is treated with great care and affection by the young warrior and he is given a new name by his age-mates—taken from the colour of the bull and they alone may call him so. Theoretically the bull is kept throughout his life, a new one of similar colour and markings being substituted when it dies. It is never given as bride-wealth. The initiates then visit their relatives in the settlement and after a short period of travel return home. In the past these visits were probably on a wider scale and according to Hofmayer "after the dance it is the custom for the Shilluk initiates to lead a nomadic life for a time, traversing the country from one end to the other." This statement is probably an exaggeration, but a period of wandering visits is common among African peoples before final reintegration into the community in adult status.

At the *Cong Bul*, initiates are introduced to their new privileges together, but the rest of the warriors are not drawn up in age-sets. At the "*Kwogo*" and "*Yok*," which are funeral ceremonies, the male Shilluk are organized according to their respective age-sets. There are few other occasions when the age-set system functions at all.

Among the Shilluk the more arduous processes of cultivation are carried out communally. A man will invite his neighbours and relatives to help him in his fields and will provide merissa for them afterwards. The helpers are not necessarily his age-mates and it does not appear

1. The Shilluk say that the custom is dying out and that few fathers have bulls to spare. In any case the youth will take the name of one of his father's bulls. The *Wath Owone* is a source of great pride to its owner and songs are composed about it which are sung for the benefit of girls.

An approximate translation of the song of Ajak, an inhabitant of the Zeraf mouth is as follows:

"I have a grey bull, a great bull,
I am going to Gollaigo to buy a bell,
A bell for the bull that lives in
My fathers byre."

18: Howell E-5 (1937) 1941 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

to be their duty to aid him. The arrangement is merely reciprocal. At the beer feast afterwards, however, the guests are arranged according to their respective sub-divisions. The two senior sub-divisions present enter the hut of their host before the others and it is their privilege to taste the beer first and approve it. They remain in the hut for sometime for they have had an exhausting day in the fields and are thirsty. Outside the hut in the courtyard are grouped the lower sub-divisions, eagerly awaiting their share which is passed out to them when those inside are satisfied with the quality of the beer. Possibly another sub-division is then allowed to enter the hut if there is room at the back.

The sub-divisions are grouped inside the hut in ascending order of seniority and the leader of the senior sub-division present, (*Pagy*) sits near the door. The *Pagy* has a special gourd which is kept full of beer by the man next him. Etiquette is rigidly observed and everyone is careful to sit in the right place and take his turn at the beer. No women are present except the host's wife or wives who sit at the back and serve the beer. Every age-set has its own song and this is sung by those inside the hut while the young men outside take up the chorus.

The existence within the settlement of organised age-sets limited by territorial boundaries is a factor which should ensure co-ordination and peace between the different lineages. The Shilluk say that age-mates will not fight each other. In fact this is an exaggeration for the sense of loyalty and mutual obligation between age-mates is not constant or strong. The reason for this is the rarity of occasions in which the age-set organisation functions to-day and the very limited purpose to which it is put. In reality, mutual ties and observances practiced by age-mates are quite outside the deeper and more permanent ties of kinship and the Shilluk is not bothered by perpetually conflicting emotions. The age-sets do not operate as such until all lineages are bound together by a common cause apart from and in a different context to internal bickerings which are not infrequent.

Political authority is not now derived from the age-set system, but from the powerful position in the settlement of the dominant lineage.

29:Dempsey M-S (1940-1954) 1955
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about mid-October, and then the large heads of grain are cut off and stacked on tables to dry out before being loaded into baskets and carried off to the village by the women. The stalks are left standing in the fields to be collected when they are needed. For the time being, then, the Shilluk is contented, having plenty to eat and drink. If the harvest has not been too good, he still has enough food for the next six months, and beyond that he refuses to look. Why should he worry about next year when he might be dead by then? His wife, equally thriftless, will load her basket with the golden grain and set off to the nearest merchants, perhaps ten or fifteen miles away, to exchange it for a handful of piastres. She knows full well that before the next rains have even begun she will have to go back to the same merchant to buy back her grain at twice the price she was given for it, or watch her family struggle in semi-starvation for the remainder of the year, but that does not deter her from crossing the road from the grain store to the general store run by the same merchant and squandering her money on a few strings of beads, a few feet of copper wire, a small mirror or such other trifles.

In the new year, when the swamps and khors are draining back to the Nile and the tall grass is drying and yellowing under the fierce heat of the sun, it is time to think of re-building and re-thatching. A well-made house will stand the rigours of perhaps ten rainy seasons; a good thatched roof for two or three. After the roof has been renewed three times, the cracking and crumbling walls are beyond further patching up, and the house must be pulled down and rebuilt. Building is a community affair, and the builders are paid for their labour in beer, the brewing of large quantities of which is an essential preparation for the work.

If a new hut is to be built, a circle of about twelve feet in diameter is marked out on the ground and a shallow trench dug round the circumference. Stakes are driven into this every six inches, so that they stand four feet above the ground, and these are bound together by coarsely plaited grass ropes woven around and in and out from bottom to top.

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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342 Meanwhile a shallow pit is dug nearby, and to the broken soil sand and water are added, the mixture being puddled by vigorous treading till it has the consistency of a thick, sticky paste. When the rope weaving is finished, this mud paste is plastered on the wall within and without at the same time, until the whole is a solid mass about a foot thick. Another party of men is busy in the meantime preparing the framework of the roof; the older men make six thick rings of grass completely bound around with rope, graded from twelve feet to one foot in diameter; the younger men select six straight tree branches about seven feet long and as thick as a man's arm, and bind these to the largest of the grass rings with rope to form the base of a cone. The remaining rings are then tied inside the cone from base to apex which is then overlaid with millet stalks, securely fastened, and the framework is now complete and ready for lifting on to the top of the wall. These various stages of the operation are marked by the drinking of beer; the bowls are first filled when the mud is slapped on to the wall, a second time when the walls are finished off, and lastly when the roof is secured in its place. This marks the end of community labour, for the thatching can be done by one man assisted by a boy to throw the bundles of grass up to him.

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342 The thatcher begins at the base of the roof tying bundles of fine grass around the edge to form the eaves; the bundles overlap and hang about a foot over the edge of the framework. Sheaves of coarser grass are laid over these and fastened into position by rope laced through the millet stalks of the framework; at the apex the grass is gathered to a point, tightly bound with rope and neatly trimmed off. When the [462] thatching is done, the women clean up the floor inside the hut and smooth it over with mud so that it has a firm, cement-like surface, and the house is then ready for occupation. This is a typical Shilluk dwelling; the king's own house may be a little better built and more elaborately thatched, but it will not differ in size or construction from this. Tradition must be observed, and as long as the king is content to live in a round house with mud walls, no window and only

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29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954)1955
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a small hole for entrance, no Shilluk may dare to build himself, say, a square hut, or improve the light and ventilation of the traditional dwelling by putting in a window.

The Shilluk is a fine fisherman, adept in the use of harpoon, fishing spear and net. The harpoon he uses consists of a loose barbed head of iron which is fitted into the socket of a long bamboo pole to which it is attached by a length of thin but extremely strong twine. When a large fish is caught on the barb, it jerks the head from the socket, and is then played by the fisherman until he is able to finish it off with his fish spear. The spear itself is normally used in the shallows of the river or swamp; the man casts it repeatedly into the soft mud as he walks along, hoping to spear the mud fish which lie in great numbers under the surface.

The use of the net by an expert is a delightful thing to watch; the net is large, fine-meshed and circular in shape, weighted round the edge with pieces of lead. The fisherman gathers it in folds over one arm and casts it with a clean, effortless sweep; it falls lightly on the water in a perfect circle, sinks slowly to the bottom and then is slowly gathered in. If it is empty, it is folded and cast again with the same easy, graceful motion.

Fishing is done all the year round by individuals, but the real season is from March to May when the river and the large inland water-courses (the khors) are at their lowest level. During this time several villages will combine together to fish a certain khor, and as women as well as men join in, it becomes a real community effort. The day before that appointed for the fishing, men will go to the khor and block up its outlets, then on the day itself there is a general exodus from the villages, the men carrying harpoons and spears, and canoes if the river has to be crossed, the women carrying heavy nets, and cooking pots too if the start is early. Arrived at the khor, the women fix the nets on poles firmly pushed into the deep mud, side by side, right across one end, leaving no way of escape. The men line up abreast at the other end and move slowly towards the nets, thrusting into the mud